

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE EARLIEST DISCOVERIES IN AMERICA, 1492-1499. By HENRY STEVENS, G. M. H. M. A. & Co. Of the American Society of Explorers and Geographers.

The greater portion of this work was first used as an introduction to the work on the Tehuantepec Railway by the brother of Mr. Stevens. We think it well that he has discovered in AMERICA, 1492-1499, the earliest discoveries in America, and that he has been able to contribute to early American history. As his work assumes to determine questions on which the greatest errors have differed, we propose briefly to examine its positions, and to give our readers an idea of them. Of the maps, the first referred to in the title-page is a portion of the celebrated map of Juan de la Cosa, dated 1500. This has been reduced from the Jonard copy, and includes only what has been supposed to be the American portion.

It is a little remarkable that neither the Spanish, Portuguese, English, nor French Governments of that date collected all available material, embodying it in maps which would have the respectability of official sanction, and the benefit of all official information. Probably the cause was their mutual jealousies, and a desire to keep their rivals in ignorance as to what their discoveries really were. The Congress of philosophers, navigators, astronomers, and cosmographers, at Badajoz, in 1524, ought to have been able to accomplish more than squabble over the respective claims of Spain and Portugal. For reasons such as we have suggested, the maps on which we rely are mainly the work of the chart or portolan-makers, and of a few scientific men and institutions. The old portolan-makers made quite a business of furnishing their "cards" to sea-going men. This map-making was really the business of Christopher Columbus before his investigations led him to devote his time to oceanic discovery. Juan de la Cosa was his map or chart-maker. He accompanied Columbus in that capacity in 1486, and made no fewer than six other voyages of discovery to the American coast, until he fell before the poisoned arrows of the natives of Cumana in 1500. During parts of 1499 and 1500, he was in Spain, and made the map referred to as Ptolemy, not far from Cadiz. Several of his later cards or maps were used, but there is nothing further authoritative from him. This map is on leather. Its eastern extremity includes the golden Chersonese on the old Ptolemy maps. On the west, or the region of new discovery, there is a vast continent which appears to stretch from the Frozen Ocean to a point in the Southern Sea, reaching the limits of his map. This map was discovered by Humboldt in 1822, and used by him to show that a more thorough knowledge of America existed at that date than the other records of discovery, as followed, would indicate. The purpose of Mr. Stevens is to show that this coast-line of North America (supposed) was really designed to be the eastern coast of Asia, and that Cosa had his data, not from discoveries made in America, but from the travels of Marco Polo, and the digest of those ideas from Roger Bacon and those who followed him.

In sketching the causes that impelled European discovery in the Fifteenth Century, the author merely touches a subject that underlies a correct knowledge of our history. The history of the wars between Christianity and Mohammedanism has been written too often in an unphilosophical and prejudiced way. Let us grant our author that the great purpose of the Spanish and Portuguese discovery was trade with India and China, and yet it is equally certain that discoveries in new lands were expected. The best evidence of this we collect from the contracts, made in advance, for the government and use of these new countries; for we suppose Mr. Stevens will not assume that it was designed that Columbus should be viceroy of "Cathay" and "Zipangri."

It is true Columbus gave it as his opinion that Antiferio Hispaniola was the "Ophi" of Solomon and Hiram, but the location of Ophi was a very vexed question with cosmographers, some placing it in Africa, some on the Arabian peninsula, and some in a country beyond the Aurore Chersonese. It is also true that a very erroneous opinion prevailed at the time as to the extent of Asia. The discoveries of Marco Polo and others may be said to have demonstrated simply that the Gulf of China or *Magnum Sinus* of Ptolemy was much too small, and that great countries and islands lay beyond that direction. The fact is that these Asiatic travelers were in a much better condition to give a coast-line as data for La Cosa than the natives of those islands (West Indies), who, at the date of the discovery, made voyages of 1,000 miles, and frequently visited both North and South America. The earliest records tell us that the navigators generally found the statements of these natives in regard to the continents and islands correct. The ancient languages of both the Carib and Arawak inhabitants of these islands had words indicating Terra Firma, or continents, in contradistinction to the islands. Of course, we do not suggest that these aboriginal narratives of the coast-line would constitute very trustworthy data, yet they were to be by no means excluded from the sources of information. In addition, it was known that in 1500, the very year this map appeared, some 300 European vessels were fishing off the banks of Newfoundland. We cannot discuss the question whether the Basques and Irish had always preserved the knowledge of these fisheries. One thing is certain, that French and English discoveries had turned the attention of adventurers of all nations to that coast. Besides the voyages that have come down to us, many discoveries not under royal license must have been made. Our author admits that Cosa knew of the discovery of Cabot before he made his map. He undoubtedly knew of the greater portion of discoveries in that direction. It is true he limits the discoveries of Cabot, by the flags, to a point indicating probably the Gulf of St. Lawrence, for the Spaniards were directly interested in denying any right of the English near their own discoveries. An examination of the map of Cabot will show that it represents, if it represents anything, the gulf and islands of the St. Lawrence, and also a very considerable coast-line stretching far south of it. He cannot be credited with any portion of that data without taking the whole of it.

Cosa also knew before he made his map that there was a very considerable coast-line to the west and south-west of Cuba and Hispaniola, across the Mexican Gulf. Both he and Columbus and all these voyagers knew that, while it might be "contiguous" to, it was not the Cathay and Zipangri of the East, that it was filled with a people who had neither their cities, their commerce, nor their wealth. Could they suppose themselves close to a power then known to possess considerable maritime activity, without meeting their vessels, or some traces of them?

The question as to whether Cosa represented Cuba as an island, or as a peninsula, is the negative. He refers to the "dash of green paint" as indicating Cosa's ignorance on that point, or that his map was a justification of the theories then held by some that Cuba was a peninsula of Asia. On this point, we dissent from Mr. Stevens. We think Cosa clearly represents Cuba as an island. The "green dash" was doubtless intended to indicate the part of the coast-survey Cosa was willing to vouch for. The defective shape of the western extremity is additional proof of this. From other sources, he had undoubtedly learned that Cuba was an island, and so represents it. The first letter of Columbus, after stating that he had explored part of its coast and turned back under the impression it was part of the main land, tells us plainly that he subsequently learned that it was "certainly an island." Of this, it is true, he entertained subsequent doubts; but he always classes it as an island; and that Cosa knew it to be such we take for granted.

The map of Cosa, indeed, clearly conveys the idea that a great continent stretched from the frozen sea southward to the world's end. It indicates, and must indicate, that if there was a water communication with the Indies, it must have been by a strait. If not, what are we to make of his South America? That coast-line to an enormous extent had been discovered, and before he made his map he undoubtedly knew of these discoveries. His map plainly represents that coast-line of South America to be Africa. Yet, what does that sea and coast-line mean away south, some two thousand miles west from the discovered coast of Brazil, across that vast continent? Are these little dots the islands on the west coast of

Africa? Of course, this is absurd; but, if the coast of Carolina and Florida was intended to represent known points in Asia, why not sail in that direction rather than search the rugged western shore of the Gulf of Mexico?

That Cosa's coast-line of South America represented the then known facts of that country, is unquestionable. Even if China had closely adjoined Mexico and Yucatan, still the vast Indian Ocean, known to the scientific world of Europe, must have lain west of it. A large portion of South America was known to lie north of the equator. So far as its coast-line was followed, it still stretched north of west, and its bend to the north-east, to make the sweep of the Mexican Gulf, was at least partially known. Where was India and the ocean west of it? It is true, an opinion was very commonly entertained then, and for some time afterward, that in the Northern Hemisphere, far north of the equator, the lands of Asia adjoined these lands newly discovered. One great question is, Did the knowledge of that time justify the idea with those who collected all that had been discovered, and embodied all that was positively known, filling up the shadowy gaps with what were evident probabilities? Above all, Does the map of Cosa contain the idea of such a continent as America has been proved to be? We think it did.

Defective although the astronomical and nautical skill of that time might have been, it will not do to forget that, in 1494, at Hispaniola, Columbus took an observation of the eclipse of that year. He found that point five hours west of Seville. Now, while Columbus, like another Joshua, had not commanded the sun to stand still at that time, nevertheless, as clear notions were entertained as to the results of the earth's revolutions as if the sun had moved. Both Columbus and Cosa knew that these five hours represented less than 70 degrees. The map of Cosa is evidently predicated in part on the facts of that observation. Now, if the distance from Seville to San Domingo was about 68 degrees, where were the other 28? Admit all that can be claimed for the fabulous extent of Asia, and yet we have more difficulties to reconcile than that the North American seaboard is the China of Marco Polo, with a great southern continent extending north of the equator, a thousand miles of Zipangri, if Cuba is "Zipangri."

Our author intimates that the Ruysch map in the Ptolemy, published at Rome in 1508, and the other American map in the Ptolemy of 1513, were merely continuations of this Asiatic blunder. The map of Peter Martyr, made in 1510 and published in 1511, shows the Floridian coast as "Terra Bimina," and is among the reprints of Mr. Stevens. That was the name given by the West India Islanders to that land. And yet its coast-line is much too correctly laid down to be attributed to Indian navigators alone. Yet this map was made in Spain two years before the discovery by Ponce de Leon which, as the initial step, has become imbedded in our traditions. In the Ptolemy map of 1513, there is a striking picture of the mouths of the Mississippi and the Floridian peninsula. Our author seems to think it was the Ganges. The world would have been small indeed to admit of such a theory, and its ideas of latitude as obscure as were those of longitude. It must be remembered that, while Columbus speculated on Cumana being contiguous to Cathay, Cosa continues and connects these discoveries with the whole east-coast-line of South America. Is it quite philosophical to confound the perplexities and surprises which met Columbus, while he and others sought in the Gulf of Mexico for a passage still further west to Cathay, with the collected data in the hands of Cosa in 1500, from all sources, guided by the wisest astronomers and cosmographers of that time?

Columbus himself, in his letter of 1498, in discussing these problems, assures the sovereigns of Spain that they have found a very great country, that Ptolemy, in fixing the limit just beyond the Pillars of Hercules, had only given them half the sphere, and that his discoveries had added a new hemisphere to the world.

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